

# ISLAM AND MODERN MAN

MARYAM JAMEELAH



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*The Call of Islam to Modern Man*

**Vol. II**

*By*

MARYAM JAMEELAH

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# بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

## INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR :

Maryam Jameelah was born in 1934 in New York at the height of the Great Depression - a fourth-generation American of German-Jewish origin. She was reared in Westchester, one of the most prosperous and populated suburbs of New York and received a thoroughly secular American education at the local public schools. Always an above-average student, she soon became a passionate intellectual and insatiable bibliophile, hardly ever without a book in hand, her readings extending far beyond the requirements of the school curriculum. As she entered adolescence, she became intensely serious-minded, scorning all frivolities, which is very rare for an otherwise attractive young girl. Her main interests were religion, philosophy, history, anthropology, sociology and biology. The school and local community public libraries and later, the New York Public Library, became "her second home."

After her graduation from secondary school in the summer of 1952, she was admitted to New York University where she studied a general liberal arts programme. While at the university, she became severely ill in 1953, grew steadily worse and had to discontinue college two years later without earning any diploma. She was confined to private and public hospitals for two years (1957-1959) and only after her discharge, did she discover her facility for writing. Marmaduke Pickthall's translation of Quran and Allama Muhammad Asad's two books - his autobiographical *Road to Mecca* and *Islam at the Crossroads* ignited her interest in Islam and after correspondence with some prominent Muslims in Muslim lands and making intimate friends with some Muslim converts in New York, she embraced Islam at the Islamic Mission in Brooklyn, New York at the hand of Shaikh Daoud Ahmad Faisal, who then changed her name from Margaret Marcus to Maryam Jameelah.

During extensive correspondence with Muslims throughout the world and reading and making literary contributions to whatever Muslim periodicals were available in English, Maryam Jameelah became acquainted with the writings of Maulana Sayyid Abul Ala Maudoodi and so, beginning in December 1960, they exchanged letters regularly. In the spring of 1962, Maulana Maudoodi invited Maryam Jameelah to migrate to Pakistan and live as a member of his family in Lahore. Maryam Jameelah accepted the offer and a year later, married Mohammad Yusuf Khan, a whole-time worker for the Jama'at-e-Islami who later became the publisher of all her books. She subsequently became the mother of four children, living with her co-wife and her children in a large extended household of inlaws. Most unusual for a woman after marriage, she continued all her intellectual interests and literary activities; in fact, her most important writings were done during and inbetween pregnancies. She observes *Purdah* strictly.

Her hatred of atheism and materialism in all its varied manifestations - past and present - is intense and in her restless quest for absolute, transcendental ideals, she upholds Islam as the most emotionally and intellectually satisfying explanation to the Ultimate Truth which alone gives life (and death) meaning, direction, purpose and value.

UMAR FARUQ KHAN

## THE CALL OF ISLAM TO MODERN MAN

Two thousand five hundred years ago, the Greek philosophers announced to the world that mankind could achieve perfection entirely through the unaided application of his rational faculties. They assured us that a man's worth depended upon his deed—not his creed—and that morality had no relevance to theology. During the European Renaissance, the humanist philosophers were determined to prove that unlimited progress could be achieved if only the full development of the individual and the expression of his creative potentialities, unhampered by the restraint of any external authority, was regarded as the ultimate purpose of life. Somewhat later, Sir Francis Bacon in his *NEW ATLANTIS* assured us that science must inevitably supersede religion and that scientific knowledge, by bestowing upon man complete control over the forces of nature, would soon usher in an earthly Paradise of comfort, prosperity and happiness. He promised us that science would abolish death, old age, disease, poverty and war then all human beings would live together in bliss for ever after. During the so-called "Age of Enlightenment" which preceded the French Revolution, Voltaire preached that if religion was only abolished from the minds and emotions of man, superstition, bigotry, fanaticism and tyranny would be by-gone relics of the medieval era. Mankind, shorn of religious bigotry, would then abolish persecution and wars. brutalities and tortures would

become things of the barbaric past. A century and a quarter ago, Marx arrived on the European scene with his *DAS KAPITAL* and its concept of the Economic Man. Just liquidate the capitalist aristocracy, he assured us, and every trace of social injustice and exploitation would disappear and this earth would be transformed into a worker's Paradise. At the turn of the century, Sigmund Freud promised us that we need only abandon social restrictions on sexual behaviour together with all feelings of shame and inhibitions, nervous troubles and mental diseases could be prevented and cured and that was the panacea for universal happiness and peace of soul.

World War I and World War II were overwhelming refutations of the Gospel of material progress so confidently and complacently preached a century ago. The savagery of these wars brought home to the whole world that despite all the modern intellectual "enlightenment", despite all the spectacular progress in science, technology and medicine, there is more strife, more cruelty, more tyranny, more exploitation, more fanaticism, more disease, pain, hunger, poverty, social injustice and unhappiness now than ever before.

In the early part of this century, Germany had attained the acme of "civilization" and "progress." Her achievements in economic development, education, the fine arts and the sciences were unsurpassed. Yet during 1939-1945 Europe under Nazi-German occupation was plunged into the darkest nightmare of terror, horror and inhumanity. The atrocities committed by Nazi-Germany should have been more than enough to destroy the widespread delusion that high living standards,



universal literacy, and sophisticated technology automatically promote the moral improvement of man. The victims of the Nazi concentration camps took some comfort in the thought that if only their experiences could be publicized widely enough, this would never happen again. But it has. It is happening right now, not only in totalitarian dictatorships but even the "democratic" countries are indulging in the same methods only perhaps on a smaller scale.\* Nazi-like atrocities are being perpetuated by Israel on the Arabs in occupied territories and on Israeli Arabs as well. In Vietnam the American crimes there equalled the Nazis in barbarism and brutality. Thus under the reign of "scientific" materialism, humans have progressed into darkest savagery only they have become sophisticated savages. At least primitive man was not so greedy or corrupt. Now virtually every country in the world is using the same instruments of torture and brutality and no end to the nightmare is in sight,

This is the call of Islam to modern man—that there is Almighty God and that man is individually accountable in all his works to Him and that transgression of God's law cannot escape drastic retribution on Judgment Day where each man will be eternally rewarded or punished accordingly. The Quran says that God is Compassionate, the Merciful One and the Holy Prophet tells us that God will have no mercy on those who are not kind to their fellow-men. This is the one and only prescription for the present age.

\*See "Inside Voster's Death-row: South African Prisons," Brian Price, *The Pakistan Times*, Lahore, August 8, 1976.

This is the only remedy to end the nightmare. There is no other.

If the prescription is to be effective, the medicine must be pure. Any adulteration will make it of no avail. The remedy for the problems of the modern world is the adoption of absolute transcendental values. The fallacy that everything must change with changing times makes life devoid of meaning or purpose since there is nothing of permanent worth. It is responsible for our "throw-away" culture which considers everything "disposable." The relativity of values is responsible for the unprecedented epidemic of vulgarity and obscenity in the mass-media, of arts and entertainments, the generation gap, widespread alcohol and drug addiction and suicide as a leading cause of death. If everything must change with the changing times, human dignity and nobility of character are almost impossible to achieve since these are based upon permanence and stability in the moral order.

Yet the orientalist and their disciples in "Muslim" lands tell us that the orthodox formulation of Islam, its institutions and culture are archaic and must be drastically re-interpreted to adjust Muslims to modern life. They assure us that it is not Islam that is petrified but only its orthodox "traditionalist" interpretations!\* What does Islam look like in modern garb? At a recent conference of the Federation of Islamic Societies of the United States and Canada, one of the speakers warned his audience that

\* *Modern Trends in Islam*, H. A. R. Gibb, Chicago University Press, 1945, p. 123.



Islam's prohibition of mixed dancing, music, picture and modern clothing was causing the erosion of faith among the young people born into Muslim families. Is the remedy for this erosion of faith that Muslims should revoke these prohibitions? To attract the young people, should Muslims follow the example of the Church and the Synagogue, build their mosques of the most modern architectural design, finance and support them with money from the liquor business and bingo games, permit mixed dances and parties on their premises, permit the girls to perform their *Salat* in mini-skirts, make the *Juma Salat* on Sunday instead of Friday,<sup>1</sup> and, in short, annul all the precepts of the *Shariah* which conflict with modern life-styles? One modernist who heads the Department of Philosophy at Delhi University insists that Muslims must face the reality that millions of people in the world today, Muslims included, have lost all faith in religion and become rebellious and defiant of religious sanctions. Therefore we find Islam being used as a rallying cry in boxing matches and on hockey fields and the only way, he says, to remove these absurdities is to renounce Islam as a complete way of life, assert frankly that the identity of religion with the state has failed in Islamic history, accept secularism as a fact of life and interpret Islam only in a narrowly religious sense as Christianity is understood in the West today. This is modern "Islam!" Those who

1. *The Arab Moslems in United States : Religion and Assimilation*, Abdo A. Elkholy, College and University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 1966.

2. "The Muslim Attitude : A Plea for Re-orientation," Prof. Syed Vahiduddin, *Impact International Fortnightly*, London, February 22, 1973, p. 8.

insist that Islam be modernized, advertise to the whole world a philosophy of defeat and pessimism. Is this the way of Islamic revival? Can modern "Islam" have any attraction for contemporary man? The modernization and secularization of "Islam" can never have any enduring attraction for people on a large scale because it is based on defeat and compromise. It takes its position from weakness, failure and progressive retreat. If the doctrine and law of Islam must be reinterpreted now, then they must be reinterpreted again and again in the future as times continually change and therefore changed and reinterpreted out of existence!

The modernization of the Muslim world is the greatest single obstacle for the expansion of *Tabligh*. Since the Muslims all over the world are abandoning their heritage and adopting Western culture, one cannot show to the world a single genuine Islamic society and state. With the possible exception of Saudi Arabia, there are no Islamic states left because in one land after another, the *Shar'iah* has been abolished as the law of land. If the accelerating trends of Westernization are not checked at once, "Muslims" will soon be no more "Muslim" than Europeans and Americans are "Christians."

One cannot remain true to Islam and adopt Western culture at the same time because the latter rests on the foundation of a defiant denial of God and the authority of His transcendental law and morality and reward or punishment in the Hereafter. All of the modern arts and sciences, dress, architecture, manners, and entertainments reflect this materialistic philosophy.



Every aspect of a culture is a reflection of its ideals. There is no exception to this rule. Due to its superior technology, energy and organization, Western civilization has shattered every other culture. None have been able to withstand its might. The Westernization of the world could be compared to cancerous, malignant growth which destroys healthy tissue indiscriminately along with the unhealthy. There is no point in arguing that there are some good things which must be used by everyone with profit. Of course, the achievements of the West in science, technology and medicine cannot be denied but the overall result of Westernization is the destruction of our entire identity. The so-called modern "Muslim" is a man or woman whose physical appearance, dress, manners, interests, tastes, inclinations, behaviour and conduct are indistinguishable from the non-Muslim. If there is no outward sign to distinguish a Muslim from a non-Muslim, then the designation, "Muslim" has entirely lost its meaning. How can we summon the call of Islam to modern man on this basis?

The earliest modernizers in the Muslim world a century ago were dismayed by the contrast between the material backwardness of the Muslims with the dazzling energy and concrete accomplishments of Europe. They thought that if only the Muslims could imbibe modern knowledge through modern education, their people would become just as strong, progressive and prosperous. Some, like Jamal-ud-Din Afghani and Shaikh Muhammad Abdub, sincerely believed that this was the proper road to Islamic revival in its call to modern man. The leaders of the

Muslim countries accepted this advice without question. More than a century has passed since then but although all Muslim countries have adopted the Western educational system as their own, they remain poor, weak and backward. In almost every case, the westernization of the Muslim world started with the army. Correctly it was assumed that to defend themselves, the Muslim countries required modern weapons. But as a result, not only beneficial modern weapons were borrowed but also along with them, western uniforms, western music and western military protocol. In Ottoman Turkey, these reforms were an integral part of the *Tanzimat* movement a century and a half ago. But despite the frantic westernization in one area of life after another, 19th century Turkey remained weak and backward, suffering one military defeat after another until only a decade after the assumption of power by the "Young Turks", who were committed to modernization and secularization, the entire Ottoman Empire was wiped off the map and the Khalifate abolished by Mustafa Kamal Atatürk. Despite westernization and sophisticated weapons bought from foreign countries, the Arabs are helpless against the imperial might of Israel. Yet the orientalist and modernizers insist that the Muslims are weak because they are not westernized thoroughly enough and prescribe another overdose of the same harmful diet. Those who merely imitate and not create, those who are always passive receptors instead of active givers, are defeated in the inevitable course of events because their initial position is one of failure. The call of Islam to modern man can succeed only if it

proceeds from a position of strength, independence and self-confidence.

Why is westernization so attractive to the Muslims as it is for everyone else? It is irresistible because it is easy. Contemporary civilization is based on self-indulgence while that of Islam require sacrifice, altruism, discipline, self-control and endurance which are difficult. But self-indulgence leads to decadence and decline while the opposite qualities, which Islam demands, lead to superior strength, unity and virtue. If practiced in its right spirit, Islam leads to social integration. Self-indulgent materialism leads to social disintegration and ultimately collective suicide.

That is why the wholehearted adoption of transcendental absolute theology, morality and law is the only hope for modern man's survival. Why Islam and not other religions? Hinduism, in which modern youth exhibit so much interest, is based on the caste-system and the exclusion of all outsiders from its fold which is utterly incompatible with human brotherhood. Buddhism has for its ideal the monk and the monastery and a complete non-concern with all worldly problems. Like Hinduism, Judaism rigidly excludes on principle from its fold non-Jews who are looked down upon with contempt. Christianity can never fulfil the needs of modern man because it officially accepts secularism and nationalism and offers no solution to social, political and economic problems.

What are the advantages and social benefits of the unquestioning acceptance of transcendental morality and law over relative secular systems? The prime

advantage is the obedience to justly constituted authority. Modern man desperately need a Supreme Authority for reference to distinguish between what is good and what is evil, what is right and what is wrong, what is beautiful and what is ugly. This does not mean totalitarian dictatorship but the Rule of Law in its highest sense. Only the Divine law of the *Shariah* is impartial and just ; where ruler and ruled, rich and poor, young and old, celebrities and ordinary anonymous folk are equally subjected to its jurisdiction. It is the *Shariah* of God and not the ruler or the people who are sovereign in an Islamic state and the ruler retains the right to his power to govern only in so far as he upholds and enforces it. Only Divine, transcendental law can command respect, reverence and unquestioning obedience. Secular law cannot possibly do this for how can people respect what may be rejected by a vote of the people as obsolete tomorrow? In the modern world, all authority is defied ; children rebel against parents, students against teachers, workers against their employers and people against the Government. Under such anarchy, civilization cannot continue to exist.

The authority of the *Shariah* proceeds from Almighty Allah. Thus it is feared, esteemed, loved and obeyed simultaneously. It combines the internal sanctions of fear of Allah and His retribution in the Hereafter with severe but just corporal punishments for violation of that law on which the health of the individual and society depend.

Secondly, the call of Islam to modern man is the call to stability and inward peace. A society based on



the precepts of fear and reverence for the Divine Law will not be troubled with crime, violence and lawlessness.<sup>3</sup> A society based on the precept of the Holy Prophet that Allah is not merciful to those who do not show respect for their elders and affection for their young ones will not have any problems of the "generation gap." Under Islamic law, the family, which is collapsing, will regain its health and strength as the foundation of the social order. Obedience to the Prophet's command that all intoxicants are unlawful can stop the curse of alcoholism and drug-addiction. In Islam, the *Shariah* is the objective, fixed, eternal authority giving stability and peace. Therefore the energies of a people need not be wasted in order to decide by democratic vote whether or not to legalize alcoholic drinks and intoxicating drugs, whether or not to legalize abortion for any woman who does not want to be pregnant, whether or not to legalize adultery and premarital intercourse in private between consenting adults, whether or not to pass laws curbing the practice of racial discrimination or whether or not religion should be separated from morality in the public schools.

An Islamic state would not have such problems as a Jewish pupil being given food to eat that is not *Kosher* or a Muslim girl being compelled to wear a mini-skirt and bareheadedness as part of a school's uniform. The principle of each protected minority and majority religious and ethnic group under the *Millat* system

3. "According to a Gallup poll just released, one-third of the residents of inner-city areas in the United States have been mugged, robbed or vandalized in the past year."—*United States Information Service News Summary*, Islamabad, January 17, 1973, Vol. II, No. 10, p. 2.

being allowed to perpetuate its own religion and culture through their own schools in their own autonomous communities would satisfy everyone.

Individually, Islam would bring a direction, meaning and purpose to life which materialistic cultures cannot provide ; an inward serenity and peace even in the midst of external frustrations and adversity which would greatly reduce the incidence of mental and nervous diseases and suicide as a leading cause of death. An Islamic culture would put an end to all the ugliness, vulgarity and obscenity which surrounds us—in architecture, dress, articles of daily use, arts, literature and entertainments. Materialism is a hideous disease which manifests itself in the aesthetic tastes and inclinations of the materialists. The Holy Prophet said that God is beauty and delights in the beautiful and therefore we should want to do everything beautifully. The ugliness of our present environment would be supplanted by beauty and this would greatly contribute to mental health and individual happiness.

Modern historians again and again tell us that history cannot repeat itself ; that we cannot reverse the trend of “evolution” and turn back to an earlier period. They say that a dead or dying civilization can no more be resurrected than a dying man can be returned to life. They ignore the fact that human civilization is an ideological rather than a biological phenomenon. It is possible to revive any civilization once those same values on which it was based again command the allegiance of large numbers directed by effective, capable leadership.

Unfortunately, this hope does not decrease the difficulties and obstacles of those workers for *Tabligh* who wish to summon modern man to Islam. How can Europeans and Americans be attracted to a faith which is being deserted in wholesale multitudes in the Muslim homelands for Western culture? How can non-Muslims have any respect for Islamic values if the Muslims daily show these nothing but contempt?

Muslims of this century have been raised and educated in non-Islamic environments under political, economic and social systems imposed by Western cultural dominance. Most educated and influential Muslims today have either acquired their training in the West or in Western-type educational establishments in their own countries. Thus it is only natural that to follow the Western pattern appears inevitable. Western cultural life is an integral part of their daily experience because they see it dominant and in actual operation everywhere. On the other hand, the Islamic order, (especially in its political and economic aspects) exists nowhere today nor has it functioned in its entirety since the distant past. The ideal Islamic political, economic and social order in fact has not functioned for so long that for minds immersed in modern Western disciplines and philosophies, it is difficult to comprehend how socio-economic and political problems of today could be solved along these lines. Yet despite this, workers for *Tabligh* must uphold the ideal. Instead of harping on idealized political and economic concepts which today exist only in books and naturally make the Islamic order seem unreal and remote to the non-Muslim because there



is no probability for their implementation in the foreseeable future, Islam must be presented to the non-Muslim on the strength of its historical record as a concrete, tangible reality in the cultural life of the Muslims until the advent of Western imperial domination. We Muslims must assert the validity of the Islamic ideal as superior to that of Christianity and Western secularism on the basis of how effectively this was practiced during our past history, preferably taking examples from as recent times as possible.

It is often asserted by orientalists that the values and ideals of traditional Islamic civilization have no relevance, even for Muslims today because, like all non-European cultures, it was the product of an antiquated tradition of the pre-scientific age. They assert that only secularity is relevant to modernity, to change, to continual technological innovations, and their social consequences. Since the genuine Muslim is a traditional man, he can therefore have nothing of relevance to contribute to the daily life of the modern man. But despite the drastic environmental transformation brought about by modern technology, the basic human drives and needs remain unchanged. Therefore modern man is just as thirsty for the spiritual sustenance which alone gives life its meaning, direction and purpose as was his ancestors, even if he is not consciously aware of it.

It is the purpose for those who call modern man to Islam to awaken him to the urgent intensity of these needs, not only for the individual but for the whole of human society. Unfortunately, there remains another great obstacle in the path of a modern appreciation of Islam. Islamic civilization was not only remote



from modernity in the technological sense; it seems even more remote from the modern mind in its moral ideals, which cannot be appreciated by the secular man or even regarded by him as desirable. The spiritual ideals of Islam can be understood only by truly God-fearing people, who yearn for God's mercy and salvation in the Hereafter.

Hazrat Rabi'a bin Haisham was a slave. After having been set free, he engaged himself in acquiring knowledge and in the course of time became the *Imam* and leader of the Muslims of Basra where he had settled. He used to undertake work only for the sake of Allah. One day he asked his wife to prepare a special dish. Since he was not in the habit of making demands for himself, his wife prepared the dish with great care and attention. Hazrat Rabi'a took the food when ready to a neighbour who was insane and not in possession of his senses and fed him with his own hands. The saliva was dripping profusely from the mouth of the afflicted man but Hazrat Rabi'a continued to feed him with pleasure. When Hazrat Rabi'a returned home, his wife complained bitterly that he had given the food which she had prepared with so much labour to a person who did not know at all what it was. Hazrat Rabi'a replied : "But Almighty Allah knows it full well and that is all I care for."<sup>4</sup>

Those who wish to call modern man to Islam must make him understand and appreciate such virtue which is utterly foreign and incomprehensible to the materialist. By an effective presentation of the profound richness of Islamic culture as an historical actuality in the life of the Muslims until the recent

4. "Picture of Loyalty to Faith," *Yaqeen International*, Karachi, February 7, & 22, 1974, p. 228.

past, he must make the modern man appalled by the spiritual poverty in which he must live and long for a better life not limited to this world.





# MARYAM JAMEELAH'S THOUGHT- PROVOKING BOOKS ON ISLAM

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